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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Challenges Hindering English Public Speaking Among Undergraduate EFL Learners at Nangarhar University

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is the productive and critical skill of language. It is one of the big goals of college and university students to be a fluent speaker of English while after graduation 60-65 % of the learners doesn't achieve. It's also called the output of language. It is important to mention and we believe that language cannot be learned only through input. There is a vital role of output. Therefore, this paper conducted on challenges hindering English public speaking among undergraduate EFL learners at Nangarhar University. The study used quantitative research design. In addition, this study used close-end questions for collecting data. There were 50 participants of ELD students from different level freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior classes. Finally, the participants revealed the key challenges while they speak in public such as, limited time and practice, psychological and cultural factors, linguistic influences, and social norms or in another words, the study shows that the mix of linguistic, psychological, and cultural factors affects learners public speaking performance.

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Introduction

It is fact that speaking is one of the productive skills of a language through which we can convey and exchange our ideas, news, information, and data with each other. In other words, speaking is the output of a language through which we can produce a language. "Language generated by the learner (in speech or writing) is referred to productive" (Nunan, 2003, p. 48). Public speaking is widely recognized as a critical and productive skill in language learning, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It helps students explore their ideas clearly, practice real communication, build confidence, and develop thinking skills that are important for academic and professional life. In EFL contexts, where students have limited chances to use English outside the classroom, public speaking activities offer valuable practice to improve their communication abilities.

Now, there is a need to explore such issues in different learning environments, including Afghanistan. In Nangarhar Universities, English education is mainly provided by the English Department of Languages and Literature Faculty (ELD). Students are expected to become fluent and confident English speakers. However, little research has been done to study public speaking experiences among these EFL undergraduate learners. Therefore, this study aims to explore the possible challenges that may affect public speaking among EFL undergraduate learners at the Department of English, Nangarhar University.

Objectives

- To identify the primary factors affecting EFL learners' public speaking abilities.
- To evaluate the psychological impact of public speaking on EFL students.

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- To explore the role of cultural and linguistic factors in shaping students' public speaking experiences.

Research Questions:

- What are the primary factors that affect the public speaking abilities of EFL undergraduate learners at Nangarhar University?
- How public speaking psychologically impact EFL undergraduates at Nangarhar University?
- What are the ways do cultural and linguistic factors influence the public speaking experience of undergraduates at Nangarhar University?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it seeks to explore a previously uninvestigated area, aiming to benefit students, teachers, curriculum developers, and researchers by offering a deeper understanding of the public speaking challenges among EFL undergraduate learners at Nangarhar University.

Literature Review

Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) discussed in his study on Turkish University students that public speaking anxiety is a widespread issue among EFL learners. They observed that fear of negative evaluation was a dominant factor contributing to students' enthusiasm and autonomy to speak in English during classroom activities. Students often worried about making grammatical mistakes or mispronouncing words, leading to avoidance of speaking opportunities. The study revealed that this fear was deeply fixed and significantly hindered students' oral performance. They emphasized the importance of building a supportive and cooperative learning environment where students feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment. In addition, they suggested that instructors play a fundamental role in reducing anxiety by encouraging student participation, group working, praising efforts, and correcting mistakes constructively rather than critically.

The importance of public speaking for EFL learners has been argued in many studies. For example, Liu (2007) found that EFL learners in China often faced problems such as speaking anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Similarly, Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem and Taqi (2015) stated speaking difficulties among Kuwaiti EFL students, identifying limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, and low confidence as major barriers. Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2015) also pointed out that a lack of speaking opportunities, teacher-centered methods, and cultural factors can affect public speaking development in EFL learners.

Kalra and Siribud (2020) in the Thai educational context discovered that psychological factors such as low self-esteem and fear of judgment were central to students' struggles. Their findings revealed that students often avoided speaking tasks because of their fear of failure and embarrassment. The researchers noted that even proficient students hesitated to speak in front of others, showing that the problem was more emotional than linguistic. They recommended implementing classroom activities that promote confidence, such as group discussions and peer feedback, which could help students gradually build their self-confidence. Besides, they suggested practical strategy to improve public speaking anxiety by creating a less formal and more encouraging atmosphere during speaking activities.

Priya (2024) conducted a study among undergraduate students in Nepal. He explores their perceptions of public speaking anxiety in English classes. The research provided a unique perspective by identifying that students' concerns extended beyond language barriers to include personal insecurities. While speaking, they feel fear of being judged based on appearance or physical presence. Many students felt identified not only for their linguistic ability but also for how they looked or sounded, which amplified their anxiety. Priya emphasized that these psychological and emotional elements should be addressed alongside language instruction. The study suggested inclusive teaching practices, sensitivity to students' personal concerns, and positive reinforcement as means to create a safer space for public speaking practice.

According to Tajik and Noor (2022), structured debate activities within such clubs foster not only gains in fluency but also the cognitive agility required to organize and articulate arguments in English, a finding that underscores the dual linguistic and metacognitive benefits of communicative practice. Besides, Elnadeef and Abdala's (2021) examination of voluntary English clubs in a Saudi Arabian university revealed that students' autonomy and intrinsic motivation are significantly enhanced when learners choose their own topics and formats of discussion. Autonomy-supportive activities in speaking clubs encourage students to negotiate meaning, request clarifications, and deploy strategic competence, all of which contribute to the development of fluent speech.

In addition, Muslimin (2022) documented how diverse speaking club activities such as storytelling, role-

play, and group discussions simulate real-world communicative scenarios, helping learners to practice turn-taking, topic management, and repair strategies. These task-based approaches promote fluency by requiring learners to plan and execute messages under communicative pressure, rather than relying solely on memorized scripts.

Then, Sayedi and Ayoobi (2023) observed that cooperative group work within speaking clubs enhances learner engagement, especially among students who are typically reticent in large lectures. They found that small group sizes and focused tasks promote equitable participation, allowing each student multiple opportunities to speak. In addition, Meilasari et al. (2022) systematically linked cooperative learning strategies to lower levels of communication apprehension, demonstrating that when learners work together toward a common goal, fear of negative evaluation diminishes. The affective benefits of shared responsibility in group tasks not only support fluency but also bolster self-esteem. Indeed, students in their study reported feeling less isolated and more willing to experiment with complex structures, attributing their increased self-confidence directly to the supportive dynamics of the group. Cultural and institutional factors shape how speaking clubs are implemented and received. Suriyah and Mazulfah (2023) highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity in designing speaking activities, noting that topics and formats must align with students' values and social norms.

In addition, Shen and Chiu (2019) stated in their investigation into Taiwanese EFL learners' speaking difficulties. They identified linguistic limitations, particularly restricted vocabulary, and poor grammar knowledge, as the major challenges. Shen and Chiu recommended incorporating more vocabulary-building and grammar-focused speaking exercises in the curriculum. Their findings suggested that increasing linguistic competence can help reduce anxiety and enhance public speaking skills. After that, Taqwa et al. (2022) in their mixed-method study conducted in Indonesia, Taqwa and colleagues (2022) focused on the speaking anxiety experienced by EFL learners in classroom settings. They found that many students exhibited high levels of anxiety, particularly when speaking in front of large audiences or strict teachers. Peer comparison and fear of being judged further intensified their nervousness. The researchers noted that anxiety was not just a result of lack of language proficiency but also influenced by the social dynamics in the classroom. Their recommendations included creating a non-threatening learning environment, using group work, and giving supportive feedback to help reduce anxiety and foster better public speaking performance.

Trang et al. (2013) studied the effects of performance pressure on EFL learners in Vietnam, Trang and her colleagues. Their research showed that competitive classroom environments discouraged students from participating in speaking activities. The pressure to outperform peers made students reluctant to speak, especially if they felt their skills were inferior. The researchers suggested implementing assessment methods that reward effort and improvement rather than perfection. They also emphasized the need for collaborative rather than competitive speaking tasks.

Methods and Materials

This academic research uses quantitative research methodology to explore the challenges faced by EFL students in public speaking at Nangarhar University. The study chose this design because it allows researchers to generalized findings on ELD Students at Nangarhar University. It is also important to state that for collecting data we use closed-ended questionnaire and Likert scale items. This can help us to measure how is the students feeling about various speaking challenges and difficulties. The collected data will be analyzed using basic statistical methods like frequencies, percentages, and averages. This method offers a clear and measurable way to study public speaking issues in the EFL context.

In the method part of this study, the main tool for data collection the study used in this study is 16 closed-ended questionnaires with three major different parts. The questionnaire will be based on previous studies conducted about the mentioned problem to ensure it covers major public speaking issues like anxiety, fear of mistakes, vocabulary limitations, and pronunciation difficulties. Second, most questions will be in Likert scale format to make it easier for students to respond. researchers struggled a lot to keep the questions clear, simple, and aligned with the study's objectives. The questionnaire aims to gather relevant and useful data from students regarding their speaking challenges. in summary, there are totally 16 closed-ended questions. Six questions were about environmental factors affecting public speaking. Five questions were about psychological impact on public speaking and five questions were about cultural and linguistic influences on public speaking of ELD students of Nangarhar University. The questionnaire was structured

using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree, disagree, Strongly Agree and agree. This format was chosen to encourage significant responses and minimize neutral answers for enhancing the clarity and

In addition, the researchers will distribute the questionnaire to selected students during class time, with support from their teachers. Then, students informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their answers will remain confidential and used only for academic purposes. The questionnaire collected immediately after completion to reduce the chance of losing any responses and to maintain a high response rate. This method ensures that the data is gathered efficiently and in a controlled environment, because it can help us to collect reliable and organized responses from students who experience public speaking activities.

Sampling Method and Size

This study chooses 50 male students from the English Department at Nangarhar University based on probability sampling which is used in quantitative research. The total population at NU, English Department includes around 250 EFL undergraduate male students. These students come from different academic years and levels. Among them only 50 students were selected. It's important to mentioned that the study used probability sampling and then the study use Stratified random sampling techniques by focusing on students who have prior experience in public speaking activities like presentations or debates. First, the students were divided into 5 groups based on their problems for example, problem in reading, writing, translating, listening, and public speaking. Each group consists of 50 students. After grouping, the researchers choose the public speaking group for the study. This ensures that the responses are meaningful and based on real experience, even though the small sample size might limit the generalizability of the findings.

Data Analysis Technique

The data collected through the questionnaires will be analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical methods such as frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores will be used to summarize and interpret the participants' responses. First, the data will be entered into Excel and organized into tables to show the distribution of answers for each item. Then, basic calculations will be performed to identify the most common challenges faced by EFL undergraduate learners in public speaking. In all, using Excel will help present the results in a clear and understandable way, supporting the analysis of the research questions and objectives.

Results

Demographic Information

The questionnaire was answered by 50 students from English Department of Languages and Literature faculty, Nangarhar University. The students came from different years: 10 were first-year students, also called freshmen; 10 were sophomores or second-year students; 15 were juniors or third-year students; and 15 were seniors or fourth-year students. This shows a good mix of students from all levels of the English program among around 250 students.

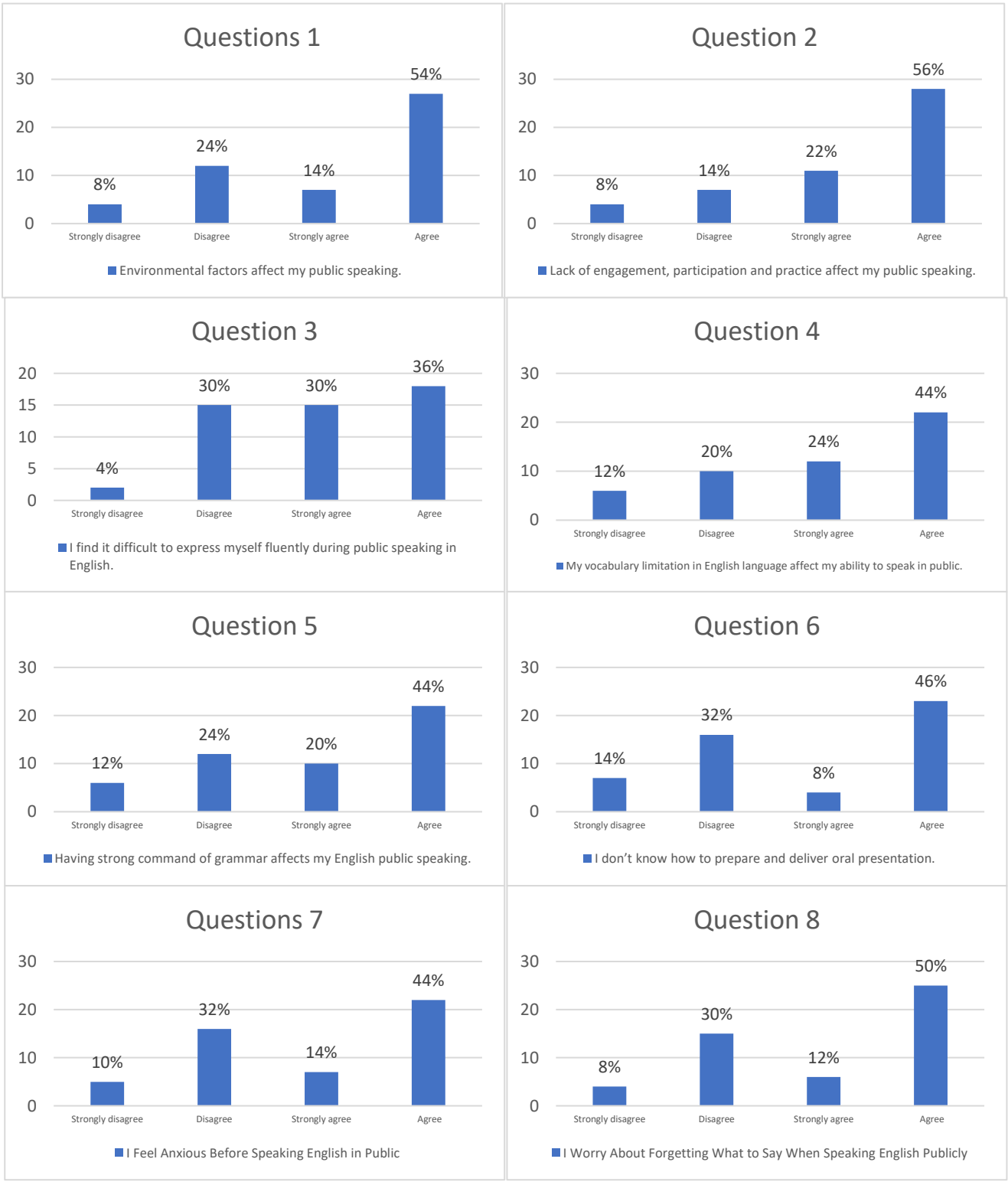
When it comes to age, most of the students were young adults. 20 of them were between 18 and 21 years old, which is the typical age for university students. 27 students were a little older, between 22 and 25 years. Only 3 students were above 26 years old. This means the participants were mainly young learners, which fits the usual university student age in Afghanistan.

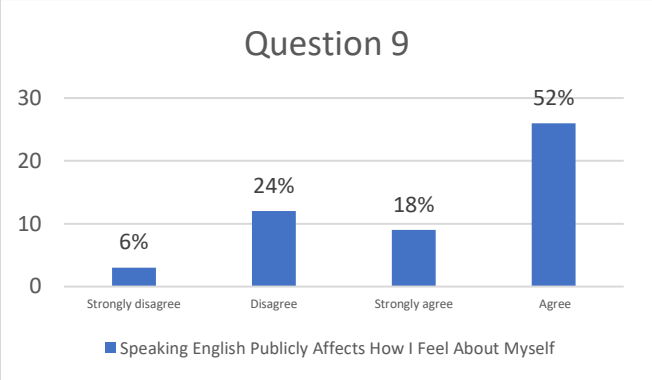
The students were also asked about their English proficiency levels. Only 6 students stated they were beginners in English. The majority, 30 students, reported that they have an intermediate level of English. The remaining 14 stated that their English was advanced. This tells us that most of the students felt comfortable with English but were not experts.

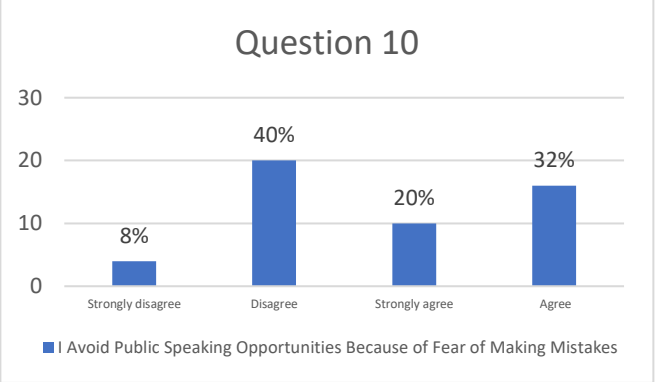
Finally, the questionnaire asked about their experience in public speaking. Five students said they had no experience at all. 25 of them said they had a little experience, 14 respondents had moderate experience, and only 6 of the participants had a lot of experience in public speaking. This shows that many students have limited experience in public speaking, which might affect their confidence and ability.

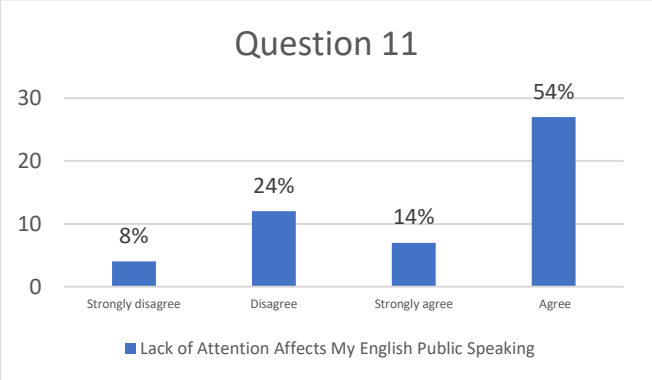
Questionnaire Responses Analysis 1.1					
No	Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Part one: Environmental Factors					
1	Environmental factors affect my public speaking.	4	12	27	7
2	Lack of engagement, participation and practice affect my public speaking.	2	7	28	11
3	I find it difficult to express myself fluently during public speaking in English.	2	15	18	15
4	My vocabulary limitation in English language affects my ability to speak in public.	6	10	28	12
5	Having strong command of grammar affects my English public speaking.	6	12	22	10
6	I don't know how to prepare and deliver oral presentation.	7	16	23	4
Part two: Psychological Impact					
7	I Feel Anxious Before Speaking English in Public	5	16	22	7
8	I Worry About Forgetting What to Say When Speaking English Publicly	4	15	25	6
9	Speaking English Publicly Affects How I Feel About Myself	3	12	26	9
10	I Avoid Public Speaking Opportunities Because of Fear of Making Mistakes	4	20	16	10
11	Lack of Attention Affects My English Public Speaking	4	12	27	7
Part Three: Cultural and Linguistic Influences					
12	I Change How I Speak in Public to Match the Culture	14	22	9	5
13	When I am Speaking in Formal Settings, I Feel Pressure	16	26	6	2
14	Cultural Differences in My Community Make Me More Nervous About Public Speaking	22	16	6	3
15	My First Language Impacts My English Pronunciation During Speaking English Publicly	13	25	10	2
16	I Sometimes Directly Translate Expressions from My First Language When I Speak English in Public.	4	16	23	7

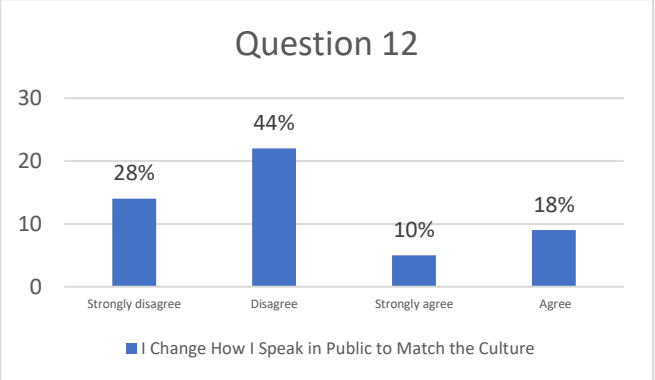
Questionnaire Responses Analysis 2.1

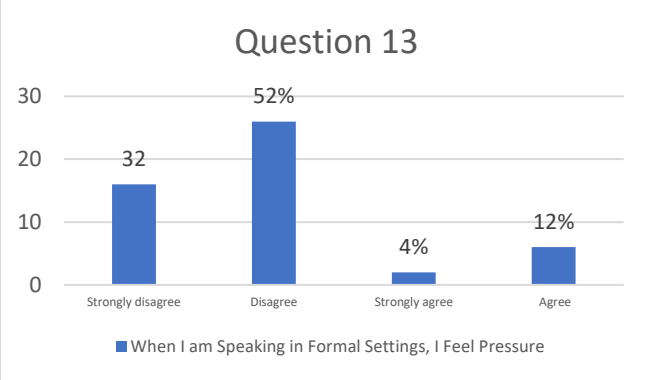


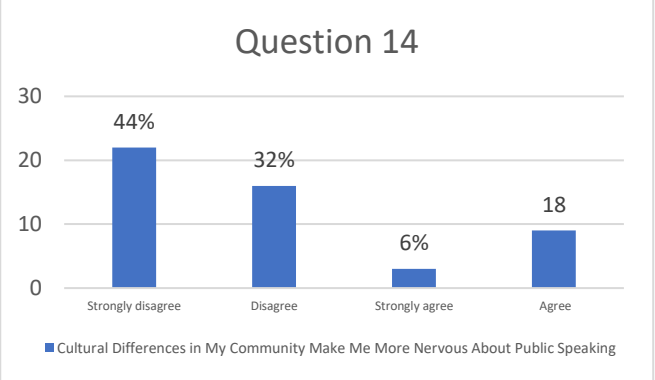

Question 9
30
20
10
0
6%
24%
18%
52%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
Speaking English Publicly Affects How I Feel About Myself

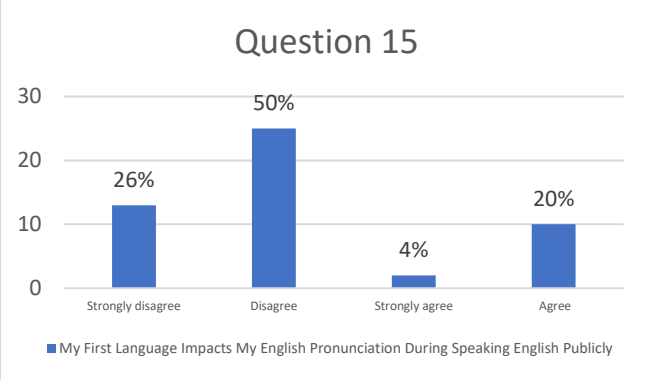

Question 10
30
20
10
0
8%
40%
20%
32%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
I Avoid Public Speaking Opportunities Because of Fear of Making Mistakes

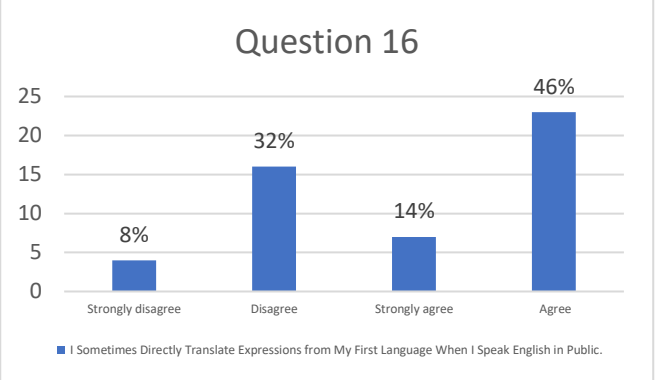

Question 11
30
20
10
0
8%
24%
14%
54%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
Lack of Attention Affects My English Public Speaking


Question 12
30
20
10
0
28%
44%
10%
18%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
I Change How I Speak in Public to Match the Culture


Question 13
30
20
10
0
32
52%
4%
12%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
When I am Speaking in Formal Settings, I Feel Pressure


Question 14
30
20
10
0
44%
32%
6%
18
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
Cultural Differences in My Community Make Me More Nervous About Public Speaking


Question 15
30
20
10
0
26%
50%
4%
20%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
My First Language Impacts My English Pronunciation During Speaking English Publicly


Question 16
25
20
15
10
5
0
8%
32%
14%
46%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Strongly agree
Agree
I Sometimes Directly Translate Expressions from My First Language When I Speak English in Public.

Findings

The first part of the questionnaire showed that environmental factors affect public speaking for many students. Most students agreed that things like the place where they speak, noise, or the audience's reactions can make them nervous or less confident. More than half of the students said these things affect their ability to speak well.

The students also said that lack of practice is a big problem. Many students said they do not get enough chances to practice public speaking or do not join speaking activities. Because of this, they feel shy or unsure when they speak in public. This shows that practice is very important for improving speaking skills.

Another big problem is language skills. Many students said they find it hard to express themselves fluently because they do not know enough words or grammar. Limited vocabulary and grammar problems stop them from speaking freely. Some students also said they do not know how to prepare and deliver oral presentations. This makes their public speaking weak.

The second part of the questionnaire asked about feelings and thoughts. Many students said they feel anxious or worried before speaking English in public. More than half said they worry about forgetting what to say or making mistakes. Some students said they avoid speaking chances because they are afraid of errors or being judged. These feelings of anxiety and fear are big barriers to good public speaking.

The third part looked at culture and language Influence. Most students said they do not change how they speak to match culture or feel pressure in formal settings. However, many said their first language affects their English pronunciation. Some students also said they sometimes directly translate words or phrases from their first language when speaking English. This can cause

mistakes and make their English sound less natural.

The findings of this study agree with many earlier research studies. For example, Brown (2007) explains that environmental factors like audience and setting can affect how well students speak in public. When students feel uncomfortable in the environment, they are less confident. This is like our finding that many students think environment matters.

Lack of practice is a common problem for EFL learners. According to Thornbury (2005), regular speaking practice is very important to improve fluency and confidence. Without enough practice, students often feel shy or afraid to speak. Our study showed that most students agree with this idea.

Language problems like limited vocabulary and grammar also make public speaking hard. Nation (2001) states that knowing many words and grammar rules helps learners speak more clearly and confidently. This fits with the result that many students said vocabulary and grammar limit their speaking.

The psychological problems found in this study, like anxiety and fear, are well-known in research. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) describe "foreign language anxiety" as a common problem for language learners, especially in speaking. Many learners feel nervous, worry about mistakes, and avoid speaking situations. Our students' responses support this theory.

On culture and language influence, Alptekin (2002) discusses how a learner's first language and culture can affect their English. Language interference, like direct translation, often causes errors in pronunciation and sentence structure. This matches the finding that students sometimes translate directly from their first language.

Discussion

In this academic paper the explore the challenges that hinder English public speaking among undergraduate EFL learners at the Department of English, Languages and Literature Faculty, Nangarhar University. The study focused on three main objectives: identifying the factors affecting public speaking, understanding the psychological impacts, and analyzing cultural and linguistic influences on students' English public speaking abilities.

The findings showed that several factors affect students' English public speaking. Many participants agreed that environmental factors, lack of practice, and limited vocabulary and grammar skills made it difficult for them to speak confidently in public. Psychologically, many students experienced anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and worry about forgetting what to say, which negatively impacted their willingness and ability for public speaking in English. Culturally and linguistically, students stated that their first language and cultural expectations influenced their pronunciation and sometimes caused nervousness during public speaking.

When compared with existing literature, these findings generally align with previous studies. For example, research by Horwitz (2001) and MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) confirmed that anxiety and fear are

common psychological barriers for language learners in public speaking. Similarly, the influence of vocabulary and grammar limitations on speaking ability is supported by findings from Nation (2001). Cultural and linguistic impacts on pronunciation and speech style have also been noted by scholars such as (Kramsch, 1998). However, this study adds new evidence from the specific context of Nangarhar University and highlights how these factors interact in this unique environment, offering localized insight that enriches the broader understanding of EFL learners' challenges.

It is important to declare that this research was limited to male undergraduate students of the English Department at Nangarhar University. Therefore, the results may not fully represent other departments, female students, or learners from different universities. Future studies can expand the scope by including diverse groups to provide a broader understanding of English public speaking challenges.

In addition, this academic paper help ELD. Learners of Nangarhar University to strong their art of public speaking. Finally, this study contributes ELD undergraduate, graduate and English language lecturers to improve their public speaking and be a good English speaker.

Recommendations

Based on the results, several recommendations are proposed. The universities should provide more opportunities for students to practice public speaking in a supportive and less stressful environment. Besides, they should prepare separate workshops building vocabulary, grammar improvement, and presentation skills which can help learners to improve their confidence and performance. Additionally, they should provide and find psychological support programs such as stress management and anxiety reduction techniques which can help students build their confidence and feel free of fear while speaking in public. Moreover, Teachers should also consider the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students and create lessons that respect and incorporate these differences to ease learners' public speaking anxiety. Besides, teacher should apply group working activities, let and motivate students to participate, use cooperative and communicative teaching approach. He also should share his authorities and change his role to facilitator and he should not show himself the only source of information, but let the students research and speak it up. Finally, the university should also provide speaking clubs for student's speaking and pronunciation practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the multiple challenges that hinder English public speaking among EFL learners in English department at Nangarhar University. By understanding these factors and how they connect to existing research, educators and institutions can design better strategies and programs to help students become more confident and effective English speakers in public settings as mentioned above in recommendations.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on students from one university and one department. Future research can include more students from different universities and faculties to get broader results. Also, qualitative research like interviews or focus groups can help understand students' feelings and experiences in more detail. Future studies can look at how teaching methods or technology (like speaking apps) affect students' public speaking skills. It is also useful to research teachers' views on the challenges students face and how they help them.

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